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ABSTRACT

This collection of articles, intended for kindergarten teachers, focuses on the importance of the teacher's relationship with parents and the need for parents to be active participants in their child's educational development. The first article reviews the literature and research related to parent/early childhood education, touches on some current issues, and suggests that parent education is a necessary prerequisite to parent involvement in the school program. The second article presents a systematic plan for parent-child involvement which includes conducting a needs assessment, drafting an overview, formulating a plan, initiating contact and evaluating the process. The final article describes how parents and others from the community incorporated to provide various language arts experiences for children in the kindergarten. (Author/SS)

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KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM ISSUES

PARENT EDUCATION

Edited By

Sue Ann Bates, Ph.D., Supervisor
Early Childhood Education

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Bulletin No. 8210

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KINDERGARTEN TEACHER ADVISORY PANEL

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PREFACE

> "When the teacher and the parent share their understanding of the child and agree on the direction for his learnings and development, his chances for a good start in his education are greatly increased."
>
> Millie Almy,
> The Early Childhood Educator at Work

Today there is a need for home and school to interact and a need for parents to see themselves as 'teachers.' This bulletin is written to assist the kindergarten teacher to rethink the importance of the teacher's relationship with parents and the need for parents to be active participants in their child's educational development. Traditionally, the teacher had a teacher/child relationship in the classroom setting only. The articles presented in this Kindergarten Curriculum Issues bulletin suggest that the relationship now includes teacher/child/parent. The settings are the classroom and the home, with the parent being present in the classroom and the teacher being present in the home.

Dr. Joseph T. Lawton reviews the literature and research related to parent/early childhood education, pointing out the current issues, and suggesting that parent education is a necessary prerequisite to parent involvement in the school program.

Mary Lou Pankratz provides a systematic plan for parent-child involvement which includes conducting a needs assessment, drafting an overview, formulating a plan, initiating contact, and finally, evaluating the process.

In the final article, Ruth Sylvester writes of how parent and community involvement can provide language arts experiences for children in the kindergarten.

It is recognized that parent education and parent involvement is a beneficial component of all educational programs and not just in the kindergarten. Therefore, the kindergarten teacher is urged to share this curriculum issues bulletin with administrators and collegues.

Sue Ann Bates

PARENT/EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: CURRENT ISSUES

By

Joseph T. Lawton, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin-Madison

INTRODUCTION

The relationships between adult and child are complex. Almy maintains that since the focus of such relationships should be the child, perhaps the most crucial relationship is between the teacher and parent. She says, "When the teacher and the parent share their understanding of the child and agree on the direction for his learnings and development, his chances for a good start in his education are greatly increased." (Almy, 1975, p. 167)

There is nothing more beguiling than an idea seeming to possess promise but half-formed. No one disagrees that the parent-teacher relationship is unimportant, nor that their separate and combined relationships with the child are crucial for early learning and development. However, little has been done to prepare parents as teachers or to generate a relationship between parents and teachers aimed at providing mutual assistance for the child.

I shall first take a look at the present status of the family as an "educational" environment and then the network of relationships that involve "educators" of young children, and the disparate yet related influences of the home and the school on early development.

A review of the historical factors contributing to the decline of the educative family is considered first, followed by a review of recent revival trends.

THE STATUS OF THE EDUCATIVE FAMILY

A comprehensive analysis of various perspectives from the diverse literature on the family in the United States is provided by Leichter (1974). This mass of literature on the topic of parent education in the context of early childhood education provides evidence of a widespread interest in the age-old question regarding the influence of parents, or surrogates, on the development of the young child. The pervasiveness of the argument that success in the public school system, for example, is dependent upon home environmental factors during the pre-school years stems from the undesirable evidence of large numbers of young children, albeit mainly from minority group sub-cultures, who become identified as being in need of compensatory education. The most important factor operating in compensatory education programs, as reported in the Head Start literature, is parental involvement. (e.g. Klaus and Gray, 1968; Weikert and Lambie, 1968; Willmar, 1969) The most comprehensive parenting programs in the United States have been organized in connection with early childhood compensatory education. However, these programs are extremely diverse in structure and orientation. Robinson and Robinson (1972, p. 297) comment that, "...coordination of programs in...the United States exemplifies near chaos, with narrowly conceived programs administered by public and private agencies at the federal, state and local level, often in ignorance of, and sometimes in competition with each other."

In other cases, programs for a more general population of young children have been mainly concerned with preventing failure in later stages of public school education. The Clayton program in a St. Louis suburban school district, for example, provides for children between the ages of 1-3 years from middle-class homes. Clayton's superintendent, Dr. E. W. Hobbs is reported as saying, "...in terms of overall development, (young children) make it or don't depending upon what their parents do with them between the ages 1-3." (Wisconsin State Journal, 1975) Hobbs states that between 6 and 10 percent of the pupils in this predominantly white

upper middle-class city suburb do not learn as effectively as the school system would like. It is believed that parents have little knowledge of ways and means of facilitating development in the supposedly crucial first three years of the child's life. The answer has been to organize a comprehensive home-based early childhood education program.

Such programs tend to be motivated by school or parent expectations of academic success and draw heavily upon research findings by child development experts such as White (1968) and Gordon (1969) who claim that various forms of early deprivation cause restraints on later educational success which are extremely difficult to eradicate.

At a national level, the 1970 White House Conference on children and youth pointed to the overall problem facing parent/early childhood education as societal pressures which are detrimental to the family as the first, essential learning environment for the young child. The fear that the modern nuclear family is under stress due to the atomization of support elements in the earlier extended family structure has been prevalent for a considerable time. The process of revolution from private to public emphasis in social life, which initially saw domestic "sport" and entertainment superseded by organized competitive games, in its final stage signaled the obsolescence of the educative family. The publication of Rousseau's Emile in the late 1800s was a final attempt to support domestic education. Such an ideal is now considered an anachronism and totally irreconcilable with the social needs of this present age. In our rapidly changing culture, parents as traditional mediators have been superseded by age-peers. As Riesman (1950, p. 70) put it, parents have come to collaborate in their own usurption, concerned that their children should have many friends of the same age, becoming, as it were, "...the stage managers for the meeting of three and four-year-olds." The modern nuclear family is concerned to provide its members with mutual affection, whilst the extended family's purpose was essentially educational. As the extended family

and its function declined, the "school," in its various forms, became firmly established as the main educational institution. It is an interesting fact that the slowest evolvement of a school system has been that of pre-schools. The spread of any form of educational institution for children under five years has been impeded by the long-standing fear of usurping the family. The fact that the modern family tends to suffer from serious inadequacies in providing an optimal learning environment at a crucial stage in the young child's development is too often disregarded.

It has been pointed out that the function of the family as an educational institution must be viewed in connection with competing and cooperating institutions, some of which will have educational purposes. (e.g. Ogburn and Nimkoff, 1956, pp. 492-501) The modern family's diminished function as an agent of education is an undeniable fact. It would be inappropriate to attempt to reestablish the old anachronistic order, but rather aid its adaptation to an equivalent institution appropriate to a changed social structure.

It is quite clear that the young child does not learn solely in school. Learning takes place in a much wider sphere and it is of no surprise to find that recent studies (e.g. Gordon, 1968) support the contention that parental involvement in the young child's early learning and development has a significant effect on later development.

The lack of involvement of parents and other adults as educators in early childhood education is in part due to a lack of awareness of this group's potential, and also to the traditional tendency of early childhood educational institutions to isolate and disregard parents as educators in their own right.

In recent years there has been a widespread move to establish parent education programs. It would be foolish to disregard the inevitable "bandwagon" effect, though it must also be recognized that a function of social change in the years following the second world war has been to slowly, but with certainty, create marked changes

in the role of parents, the structure of families, and a return to the view that one important purpose of the family is the education of children.

A rationale for the present emphasis on parent/early childhood education has been provided in a position paper published by the National Advisory Council on Adult Education (1975). It appears worthwhile to summarize the main points of that rationale at this juncture.

First, there has arisen a public conscience view of the need to somehow involve the family in programs which reflect an intent to improve peoples' lives by influencing in some special way development during infancy and early childhood. This view is exemplified in such authorizations as the new program for the education of preschool children in the home and day care centers under Title IV of the Education Amendments of 1974 (Public Law 93-380), and the Child and Family Services Act of 1975. This latter act states that the family is the primary influence on the child. The purpose of the Act is to provide child and family services to families requesting such services (especially those with the greatest economic or human needs), in order to strengthen family life. A critical aspect of such services is the direct participation by parents.

The major assumption underlying this Act reflects the lost status of the family. Sociologists, psychologists, psycho-analysts and educationists, over the past three decades, have been attempting to rescue its reputation, often overstating their case. Previous decline in the wider influence of the family helped to create an autonomy for the individual which created possibilities for wider social mobility according to merit. In contemporary society, the family, other than in exceptional cases, must by necessity make use of public services for their well being.

Certain family influences on a child's life chances must remain inevitable. Although public educational systems have assumed the greater responsibility for a child's education, the family's indirect educational influence remains powerful, especially in the early years.

Over the last decade in the United States, there has been a growing affirmation of two principles. The first has already been referred to, that the family is the basic unit of a free society with certain responsibilities for the development of children. The second is that the first four or five years of a child's life are a period of most rapid growth in physical, mental and social characteristics. There are strong indications that exposure to a wider variety of experiences with children and adults than those usually provided solely by the family greatly enhances a child's ability to learn. Some family patterns quite clearly develop attributes in young children which are assets to future learning; others do not. This is never more clearly the case than the disastrous affects of early deprivation. The aspirations and expectations of parents have an important influence on a child's developing attitudes. The ability of the child to fully benefit from whatever learning opportunities are offered will depend largely on the personality patterns developed through interaction with parents and siblings in the earliest years.

It is apparent that, in spite of the growth of pre-school services, education remains largely a home-produced commodity (c.f. Moock, 1974). The parent (in most cases, the mother) dominates educational influences on children under five years of age. The revalued parent is not, however, by virture of that status, necessarily an efficient educator. A number of factors affect the level of efficiency of the parent as educator.

A recent article by Mincer and Polachek (1974) indicates that women who spend the least time employed are often caught in a vicious circle which predicates less time working because they earn less, and then earn less because they spend less time employed (and in school). The reverse happens to be true also, with the initial emphasis on higher levels of education. However, Leibowitz (1974) has pointed out that for women (and their husbands) the time spent at child care increases proportionately with years of education, despite the fact that they also spend more time employed than other women.

From studies looking at home education in an economic context (e.g. Coleman, et. al., 1966), there are strong indications that more educated parents spend more time with their children during the early years, which results in higher achievement levels in public school, which tends to predict greater economic success in later years.

In the case of children from "deprived environments" it has been stated that retarded physical, psychological, and social development can be attributed to restraints created by deficiencies in the "educational" quality of family life (e.g. Milner, 1951; Deutsch, 1964). However, the defi it theory has been strongly criticized (e.g. Passow, 1970). The alternative to the deficit theory is to look for differences and to look, in all cases, for conditions under which optimal development is most likely to occur. What is not so obvious is the fact that the supposedly enrichment type environments of middle-class families may also be lacking in an adequate understanding of critical factors affecting the development of the young child. For example, as long ago as 1928, Watson was suggesting that child "training" was too important to be merely left in the hands of mothers and suggested at least six months training for nursery governess or mother. Caldwell (1967) points out that is has been made abundantly clear that it cannot be assumed most homes and parents are adequate for facilitating development of the child in these critical first few years.

An initial, and crucial, learning environment for the young child must undoubtedly consist mainly of a home and family which provides warm, nurturing relationships, and varied sensory and cognitive experiences. In order to extend the opportunities provided by the home, other helping agencies in the co.. ty must also be involved. As Getzels (1966) has commented, during early learning experiences the young child not only acquires characteristic sets of values, language, and varied social information, but some understanding of learning how to learn. To ensure a continuity between home-based learning and later school learning, the pre-school

can not only provide a link but also a continuity in the systematization of all the disparate learning experiences provided by the child's total environment.

In short, it can be argued that the development of both specific and general development can only properly occur due to a liaison between interrelated social agents. A careful preparation of such a learning environment would seem to call for some degree of training and commitment by parents and other caring persons and a degree of organization of learning experiences neither of which are always available in a natural environment.

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR: A COOPERATIVE ENDEAVOR

An interesting perspective on a suitable learning environment for the young child is provided by Illich (1972) with its emphasis on de-schooling. When he suggests the need to develop new "networks" designed to provide whatever resources the young child needs for learning, he represents that group of people who, in seeking new systems for education, have turned to the home and other agencies in the community, whilst choosing to disregard the school.

This kind of concern exemplifies a polarity position, which is in no sense clear cut in its objectives. Illich is intent on defining the inadequacies of (public) school systems in contemporary society. In one sense the view of comprehensive networks of resources is indicative of a somewhat nostalgic return to the past without an objective assessment of the true value of spontaneous neighborhood-based resources. The statement that, "The child grows up in a world of things, surrounded by people who serve as models for skills and values...finds peers who challenge him to argue, to cooperate, to understand, and...(experiences) confrontation or criticism by an experienced elder who really cares," (Illich, 1972, p. 109) is a plausible evocation of a Rousseau, naturalistic type learning environment. What is ignored here is a clear indication that, in general, for more than a century, the family has shown serious limitations as a force for educating the young child. Durkheim (1952) appreciated the problems facing the modern family. He stated, "While it (the

family) once kept most of its members within its orbit from birth to death and formed a compact mass...its duration is now brief." There has been commensurately increasing inadequacies in neighborhood resource systems to provide adequate educational resources characterized by industrialization, urbanization and high rates of social mobility.

The solution to the current concern as to where early childhood education should best occur seems to lie in redeveloping and reorienting existing community agents, including the family. Rather than ignore or destroy the school system, it would appear more suitable to develop the school not only as a necessary teaching institution, but also as the catalyst for a wide range of resources contributing to child guidance and development.

It is the contention of this writer that the single and most useful short term solution to the question of the best setting for early childhood care and education would be to ensure an integration of home-based and school-based educational endeavors. There is an inherent diversity in the quality and quantity of services which potentially may contribute to the needs of parents and their children. Let us first begin to realize this potential by improving the efficiency of two priority sources, parents and teachers.

Implications for the Teacher and Parent

There will be some characteristics of the teacher that one would expect to be shared by all teachers of young children. Conversely, the professional early childhood educator might be expected to have certain specially trained abilities. It is commonly assumed that the most effective teachers, especially those of young children, are those with particular personality characteristics. Gordon and Jester (1973) indicate very little can be assumed from research regarding relationships between teacher personality and pupil achievement, though they acknowledge that there are some indications that certain personality dimensions may be important in the context of early childhood education. Almy (1975, pp. 27-28) suggests that such

characteristics as patience, "...openness to new ideas, tolerance for ambiguity, an interest in unraveling cause-and-effect relationships, together with an ability to think and organize date in multidimensional categories (are worthy of note)." Piaget suggests that an important element in the relationship between teacher and child is an ability to take account of the concrete mode of thinking employed by the child and the more abstract thought the adult employs to systematically deal with possibilities. Harvey (1966) states that teachers who tend toward a more abstract attitude in their role are likely to be warmer, more perceptive, and more flexible in their dealings with young children. It is quite obvious that the characteristics of the early childhood educator mentioned so far may, to some degree, be those of the parent. At the same time, it is unlikely that certain of these characteristics, such as a competency in arranging for learning in cause-and-effect relationships, will occur without some measure of training.

Two aspects of the role of the early childhood educator clearly distinguish the teacher from the parent--the specialized knowledge of child development and teaching strategies. The particular teaching model adopted by the educator will depend upon a particular world view of development and associated pedagogy. (e.g. Lawton and Hooper, 1978) The early childhood educator is involved in a fairly complex network of organizational and instructional structures. The extent to which the role of the educator is adequately taken up will depend upon the quality of preparation received. Almy (1975, p. 196) has commented that, "Like many other aspects of early childhood education, training for it is complicated by the number and diversity of programs and also by the different traditions related to the provision of care and the provision of education."

It is the writer's opinion that, in the very nature of human enterprise, it is only to be expected that diversity in theoretical and practical considerations will exist. Also, it can hardly be expected that any single theory of childhood development, curriculum development or teaching techniques and strategies, will

suffice to explain and direct the educative process. Although any organized early childhood educational program will require trained teachers working in a center (school), there exists a strong opinion amongst educators that there is a need to involve parents and other paraprofessionals. Lally, et. al., (1973) claim that the involvement of a diversity of personnel should provide young children with experience of many different lifestyles, personalities and cultures.

Although the professional teacher will be trained in some college program, it is more likely that paraprofessionals, including parents, will be trained in workshop situations coupled with on-the-job experience. It appears justifiable to argue that such training may occur in a number of sites: inservice college courses, workshop courses in pre-school and day care centers, or in the home. Similarly, experiences as an educator can be acquired in school centers, the home, or various community settings.

Leaving aside any discussion of the wider context of the community as a potential learning environment, it can be considered important to establish a structure for learning that certainly includes the home and the school.

Research dealing with the effects of child-parent relationships on the early development of the child has shown, in general, that during the first three to five years, the single most important factor is the quality of the mother-child interaction (e.g. White, 1968). Gerzon (1973) reports that middle-class mothers, compared to those from less privileged homes, tend to give more detailed and specific instructions to children, supported by reasons and explanations. White and Watts (1973) were surprised at finding that such complex behaviors as getting and maintaining adults' attention, planning and carrying out complex activities and attending simultaneously to two things appeared as early as three years in some children. They attempted to ascertain causal factors for such behaviors occuring at such a young age. Accordingly, they observed children between the ages of one and three years in their homes and tentatively concluded that the most powerful

formative factors in the development of the preschool child are the direct and indirect actions of the mother interacting with the child. Amongst the various features of mother-child interaction, they reported that the most effective mothers, "Interact more with (their children), engage in more intellectually stimulating activities with them, teach them more often, encourage them more often, initiate activities with them more often." (White and Watts, 1973, p. 199) Leichter points out, for example, that the relationships between a child's educational achievement and parental behaviors are complex and remain to be understood. She goes on to say, "It is especially significant that the same parental behaviors have been found to produce different outcomes in different situations. This points not only to the need for a further understanding of the process of education within the family but also to the need to see familial education in the context of multiple and ever changing relationships within the family." (Leichter, 1974, p. 15)

It would, therefore, seem appropriate to provide parents with support during these critical years. Almy (1975, p. 173) makes a most pertinent suggestion when she says, "The child coming to school after he is two already has a history of learning. His mother is part of that history. The nature of that history is an important factor to consider when the teacher and parent try to arrive at common goals for furthering the development, learning, and well-being of the child." (emphasis added)

Differences in parental attitudes toward the role of parenting need to be taken into account when considering involving parents as educators. Some parents are satisfied to leave the job of "educating" to the professional educator. Such parents may inquire about their child's progress in school, making a clear distinction between a place to learn and the home. Other parents view the school as a complementary environment to the one they provide for their children in the home and its locale.

The process of involving parents as co-early childhood educators can begin by providing them with an opportunity to take part in informal conferences. Information

about the school's program and examples of how planning and implementation occur should stimulate the parents' interest and make them more aware of the learning experiences provided for their children. At this point an invitation can be extended to parents to come into the school to see for themselves what happens during daily schedules, and eventually to participate. It is the opinion of the writer that, if parents are willing to participate in the school program, they should be involved in pre-planning sessions and invited as paraprofessionals to teach rather than to operate as aides with little or no chance to act as teachers.

Communicating to parents the theoretical underpinnings of an early childhood education program, ideas regarding content and learning experience selection and organization, and the various roles they might adopt as teachers, can be effected in a variety of ways. Part of such "training" can occur in the school. It would probably be efficacious, however, to encourage the parent to continue this work in the home. Ideally, parents should be helped, where necessary, by home visits by a professional teacher.

The main objective of the home visit, whether it be more in the form of a social visit or of a more formal educational nature, should be to train the parent to provide a variety of suitable learning experiences for the child. The home visitor will be able to offer support while aiming to foster self-dependency in the parents. Such work in the home should also be aimed, as much as possible, in encouraging the father to become actively involved. Parent involvement in the school setting tends to rest the responsibility almost entirely on the mother for obvious reasons.

The ways of working with parents as described here provide opportunities for mother and father to become involved in the education of young children. The family can then play a vital role as an educating unit in cooperation with the special learning environment provided by the pre-school. As a cooperative endeavor such combined teaching should provide a sound basis for development in the early years.

It has been shown that, in general, when asked to consider the needs of the developing young child, parents and teachers tend to identify the same factors (e.g. Knitzer, 1972). Parents, however, tend to feel some constraints on their effectiveness in influencing their children's development in an "educational" sense. Almy (1975, pp. 188-189) quotes the example of a parent's comments in the Child Development Group of Mississippi (a Head Start program). The parent, responding to the views of a professionally trained kindergarten teacher said, "...the school people don't like it because they can't tell us what to do. Maybe they don't like us even a little worse because, maybe, we're going to do our kindergarten even a little better than them, since they never did one neither, and that's embarrassing to them... We are going to do much better raising good citizens." (as quoted from Greenberg, 1969)

Whatever the hopes and aspirations of parents, or their concept of their role as educators, it is apparent that there is a need to train them to that role. Such training requires flexible programs to meet various parents' needs, and for professional educators to adopt a working framework where the emphasis is on cooperation between professional teachers and parents.

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PARENT-CHILD INVOLVEMENT: LIFE LONG EXPERIENCES A SYSTEM

By

Mary Lou Pankratz
Green Bay Public Schools

INTRODUCTION

The education of children is no easy task. It is a responsibility which demands time, effort and expertise. Parents and classroom teachers are the prime educators. Each group's role carries responsibilities unique to itself and yet similar to each other.

Much research has been conducted which studied the effect of early education and intervention on the development of children. Studies have also criticized the time and money utilized on early childhood programs. Many claim early academic gains are later lost.

It appears, however, that numerous programs for young children center on the re-educating of parents as well. Gains are made. Children enter kindergarten and the primary grades. Gains are lost. Unless the home reinforces what is introduced at school, children cannot be assured to meet their maximum potential.

Research findings indicate the need to shift from the study of early environment and stimulation, to the study of continuous environment which fosters growth and development throughout children's life spans (Schaefer, 1972).

In general, parents provide a continuous and important influence on their children's achievement, a condition which suggests that parent-centered intervention may be the logical focus for future attempts at intervention. The greater cost-effectiveness of parent-centered intervention compared to child-centered intervention is considerable (Levenstein, 1970).

If parents have older children in school with exposure to neither child growth and development principles, nor assistance in understanding young children, the parenting stresses may have increased with each year of their children's lives. In measuring aspects of family environment which may influence a child's development, certain distinctions between "status variables" and "process variables" become important.

"Status variables" are exemplified by:

- who parents are,
- ethnic membership
- occupational level, and
- educational level.

"Process variables" include:

- what parents do,
- their style of interaction with their children,
- their aspirations and expectations communicated to their children, and
- behaviors reflecting attitudes of optimism, alienation and hopelessness. (Hess, 1969).

PROCESS VARIABLES

Previous studies suggest that it is the "process variables" which have greater impact on children's lives, and these certainly have greater theoretical utility than demographic indices for explaining how the environment mediates experiences in critical ways. Hess (1969) classifies these "process variables" into six groupings:

1. powerfulness vs powerlessness - feelings of control over the environment,
2. participation vs alienation - utilization of community resources (such alienation could interfere with development and lead to inconsistency in child-rearing practices and would serve to reduce the child's potential for cognitive stimulation),
3. control techniques - the type of authority appeals made to the child:
   a. status-normative (control characterized by demands for unquestioning obedience to an absolute authority),
   b. internal-subjective (control strategies take the child's feelings into account and serve to moderate demands made upon him, attention directed toward inner state of child/person rather than rules),

c. cognitive-rational (appeals stressing objective informational feedback and direct child's attention to the logical consequences of behavior, rather than to feelings or established rules).

4. teaching techniques - refers to the method by which mother and father organize and give meaning to the information that reaches their child and how they help him make sense of new information,

5. language process variables - the language codes that predominate between parent and child,

6. differentiation of the environment - concerned with the parent's objective differentiation of world (their knowledge of it) as well as their subjective differentiation (their attitudes and beliefs about it).

Parents need help in the area of "how to." They mostly learn by trial and error. Educators who have specialized in child growth and development coupled with the psychology of learning must model and teach these skills to the child's prime educator, the parent.

But...how does the classroom teacher handle additional responsibilities when she/he appears to be overworked now?

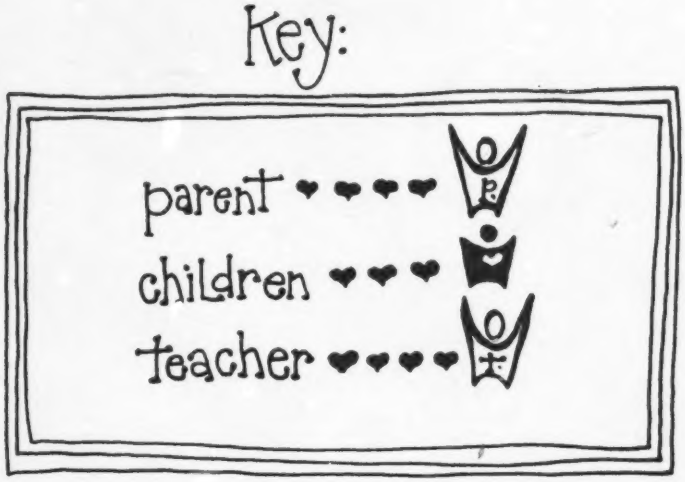
A PROCESS REPRESENTED GRAPHICALLY - "HOW TO?"

There is no one way or a magic formula. This section is merely a ten-year culmination of ideas gathered via experiences, trial and error, study, research, exposure to others, and a good deal of observation of colleagues.

Every classroom teacher is unique; therefore, parent involvement must be unique to her/him and the individual parent she/he works with. The most crucial element of this entire process is the teacher's ability to communicate and listen empathically. Such skillful techniques must be dealt with first. This can be done by attending human relations and communication workshops and/or reading a few helpful books on this topic (Gordon, 1970; Benjamin, 1974; Satir, 1976; Pankratz, 1977).

Following these kinds of experiences, one must set up some plan of action which will help the parent, teacher and the child. One mode of operation may consist of five areas:

1. Conduct a needs assessment
2. Draft an overview
3. Formulate a plan
4. Initiate a contact
5. Evaluate the process



CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHERS AND CHILDREN

It is usually necessary for educators to determine the "needs" before a program can be effectively implemented. Needs are many and may vary from parent to teacher, parent to parent, teacher to teacher and child to child. Initially, classroom teachers may be more capable of identifying their own needs and those of their students than those of the parents. Successful parent involvement programs may be facilitated if the teachers identify some basic classroom needs which may be met. It seems unlikely that teachers struggling with methods of teaching and classroom management would feel inspired to "tackle" another responsibility. However, organizing and planning a parent-involvement program could offer teachers great assistance. In reviewing "Maslow's hierarchy of needs," it would be quite difficult for teachers to help parents fulfill their needs when the teachers' needs are unfulfilled. A

wise decision may be for teachers to determine their needs as they directly relate to the children and to determine the needs of the children. Involvement in this procedure should supply the teacher with exposure to the needs of the parents. It seems inappropriate and unfair to expect teachers to begin parent-involvement by responding solely to the needs of parents.

A. List teacher needs as they directly relate to the children in the classroom, prioritize needs in terms of demand, and examine resources necessary to respond.

An individual teacher's list may look like this:

- supervise the breakfast program
- read to individual children
- listen to individuals read
- assist in interest centers
- supervise field trip
- record children's stories
- organize special projects, e.g. cooking
- housekeeping duties
- call parents for home room assignments
- clarify cultural differences
- clerical duties
- give attention to needing students

B. List children's needs, prioritize needs and examine resources.

An individual teacher's list of children's needs may look like this

- accept classroom procedure
- conduct experiment
- feel more a part of the group
- assistance conducting research
- resolve a conflict with a peer
- improve clean-up habits
- clean up activities
- help relating and/or associating concepts
- read out loud to someone
- help with self-help skills
- construct special project
- dictate a story
- stimulate desire to read
- discover new equipment
- language stimulation

NOTE: Interaction with parents in fulfilling teacher and student needs can facilitate the discovery of parent needs. The verbal and written "surfacing" of parent needs is more likely to occur when parents and teachers experience positive contacts which result in an acceptance. "Surfacing" of parent needs may occur when parents and teachers share a common ground--helping children.

CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR PARENTS

Some teachers do not choose to begin responding to their own needs; they desire to begin "reaching out" or "serving" the needs of parents. Let us review a few approaches:

1. Discover which parent needs are presently being served.
2. Discover which parent needs are not being served.
3. Discover which parent needs teachers are capable of serving.
4. Discover which parent needs other staff members and/or community agencies are capable of serving.

Information pertinent to these surveys may be gathered by:

- dialogue with administrators
- dialogue with specialists (social workers, psychologists, speech therapists, special education teachers, reading and math teachers, etc.
- dialogue with other teachers
- dialogue with instructional and clerical aides
- dialogue with school secretaries
- most importantly, dialogue with parents, P.T.O., P.T.A., room mothers, supervisors, crossing guards, cooks, chaperones, advisory members, scout leaders, neighborhood groups, etc. It is quite helpful to begin discussions with "captive parents" (those who have been involved in the school in any capacity.) Ask their opinions, criticisms and suggestions. It is crucial to accept their input! Do not attempt to focus blame on anyone, only determine preventative strategies. Follow discussions by encouraging these "captive parents" to "reach out" to other parents in the neighborhood.

A. List parent needs, prioritize needs and examine resources.

Some possible parent needs:

- better acquainted with school policies
- receive information regarding options in disciplining
- need for a support group
- need to feel valued in school community
- feel welcomed in school
- aware of child growth and development
- know more about how to follow-up on school activities at home
- familiar with educational jargon
- find ways to facilitate learning
- assistance in parenting
- understanding of teacher's expectations

NOTE: These dialogues should elicit responses to:

- Have we had home-school involvement programs?
- Which people in our system have been actively involved with parents?
- What worked, what didn't, why?
- Which families have participated in school functions?
- What local resources are available?

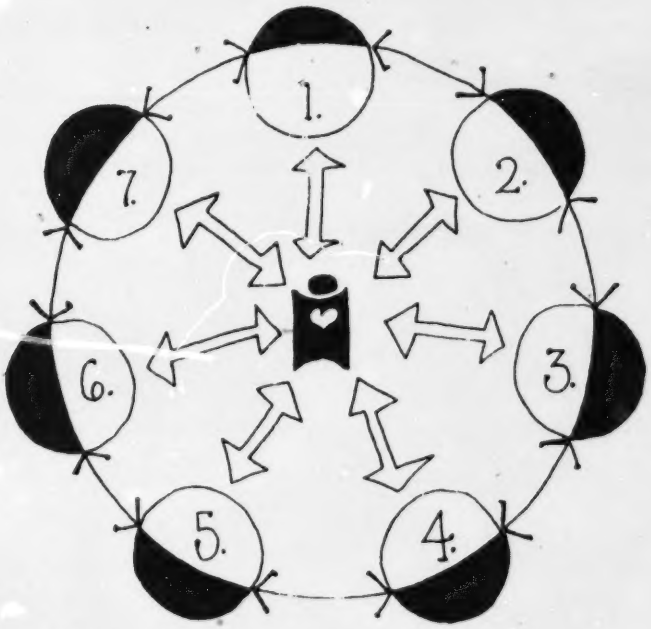
DRAFTING AN OVERVIEW

Once needs have been identified and prioritized, teachers are ready to review resources: Which parental resources are needed and which are available?

The larger circle represents the home-school contact process; it constantly is in motion.

The seven smaller circles represent levels of home-school contact. Every level may be related to another level. All levels have a reciprocating impact on the child, parent and teacher:

1. parents as audience
2. parents as references
3. parents as teachers
4. parents as volunteers
5. parents as aides
6. parents as decison makers
7. parents as learners



The teacher decides which type of involvement is needed and which type each individual parent could respond to at the particular time. This system will take time initially, but can assure greater success and teacher relief time later on.

FORMULATING A PLAN

It is important for teachers to be aware of the kind of commitment each contact may demand from them and from the parents. These steps need examination as a part of the decision making.

INITIATING A CONTACT

The teacher offers this on-going process to the parents and asks the parents where they would like to begin. It is important that the areas be defined as needs to be filled. Each area demands some explanation regarding expectations and outcomes. Hopefully, this would not be the first time the teacher "reaches out" to the parents. It is wise to develop some kind of rapport or relationship before teachers call on parents to help. Often parents feel more comfortable about reciprocating a "contact" if they feel the teachers are not strangers to them. Responding to "strangers" in a school setting is threatening and for some parents too much of a risk to handle.

NOTE: Parents and children are able and do initiate contacts, However, this is a guide for classroom teachers to encourage them to do the initiating. Therefore, the coverage of this topic shall be limited to the role of the teachers.

KINDS OF CONTACTS

It is difficult to include every potential contact. However, it is possible to offer some samplings:

- personal telephone calls,
- call home to express caring when a child is absent,
- personal hand written notes,
- notes denoting child's progress,
- ditto letters for information such as explaining class projects and/or objectives,
- newsletters regarding school policies and activities,
- school calendar of events,
- needs assessment questionnaires prepared and distributed by parents,
- school bulletins,

Kinds of Contacts (con't)

- "happy grams" which relate progress and positive news,
- monthly newsletters which list community resources and activities for parents and children,
- good citizen of the month awards,
- special birthday treat goes home with each child,
- thank you notes for appreciated efforts,
- invitation to a school function written and/or drawn by students
- report cards
- special notes on parent-teacher conference appointment sheets,
- daily classroom routine schedule,
- written list of classroom and/or school jobs which need parent assistance,
- invitations to parents to visit school anytime or on designated days,
- provide "coffees" for parents to get acquainted with each other and school staff,
- provide guided tours of the building and central office,
- open house during the day and at night,
- conferences held during day and at night,
- children's performances and demonstrations,
- invitations to attend special projects and field trips,
- regularly scheduled visits,
- have children make a neighborhood map, plan a walking field trip with the class to visit each home,
- person to person contact before or after school, at school related functions and/or at community gatherings,
- shop in the neighborhood,
- walk home with each child during the school year, or ride the school bus,
- attend neighborhood, P.T.A. and P.T.O meetings,
- invite parents to come to school to mini-teach and/or share special talents,
- student talent shows, carnivals, circuses, rummage sales, bake sales, ice cream socials, school sing-a-longs, picnics, pot-luck suppers, ethnic dinners, auctions, white elephant sales, flea markets, paper drives, etc.
- show family films and distribute popcorn, organize babysitting and car pools for school events,
- share school and community resource information,
- bring in community resource people for special presentations and dialogue sessions,
- group conferences and/or "back to school" nights to acquaint parents with their children's schedules and programs, mini-workshops on "How to assist in a classroom,"
- provide a variety of "family nights,"
- recreational programs,
- mini-classes offered during the day and in the evenings regarding parenting, child management, economics of parenting, economics of education, sex education, nutrition, health and safety, community agencies, home activities that teach the basics, child growth and development, school's policies, communication skills, your tax dollar, local government, how to know if your child has a problem, what is education like today, career development, juvenile crime, solo parenting, curriculum development, etc.,
- establish inservice programs for classroom volunteers, playground supervisors, cooperative neighborhood babysitting, advisory councils, room mothers, library readers, fund raising, etc.,

Kinds of Contacts (con't)

- set up a school mail box for suggestions, questions, concerns,
- orientation meetings,
- send samples of children's work home with positive comments and helpful "follow-up"
- provide take-home learning packets with suggestions for home involvement,
- send home "handouts" pertinent to parenting activities for home involvement,
- provide an adult resource box in school library for parents to check out articles, pamphlets and books,
- invite parents to come to school to have lunch with their children,
- make home visits,
- establish parent support groups,
- develop advisory councils,
- encourage parent evaluation and suggestion committees,
- parents work as tutors, aides and/or assistants in the classroom or school building, and
- attempt a variety of opportunities to include the varied needs of working parents, single parents, non-transportative parents, etc.

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

It seems justified if we evaluate our involvement in terms of our previous contact levels; to compare ourselves to others seems unfair. Our growth may also continue if we state our objectives realistically and in terms of action:

- To increase the number of positive telephone contacts this semester.
- To increase the number of parents accompanying field trips.
- To increase the number of parents attending board meetings.
- To increase the number of students who receive tutoring every week.

"less than" "greater than"

INVOLVEMENT CONTINUUM

It may be wise for teachers to expect reasonable increases in involvement levels over a short period of time. Parents may be hesitant when teachers begin to "reach out" and seek contact. Reminding ourselves of the numerous variables functioning may prevent a sense of discouragement and failure. Evaluation by parents and teachers will enable one to:

1. ascertain if objectives were accomplished,
2. ascertain what else was achieved,
3. ascertain what objectives need to be considered for the next planning session, and
4. ascertain what variables had an effect on the accomplishment of objectives.

It proves helpful to design evaluation checklists to which parent and teacher can respond (Pankratz, 1977).

CONCLUSION

At this time of increased teacher accountability for a return to basics teachers are strongly encouraged to begin or expand parent involvement in their educational programs. Until parents and teachers jointly respond to the educating of children they will not reach their maximum potential. Unless parents and teachers cooperatively learn from each other both factions will not maximize their possibility to meet with success. What we do today can only manifest itself tomorrow. We need each other.

This paper is taken from Home-School Contact: A Process by Mary Lou Peterson Pankratz and is reprinted here with permission of the Green Bay Area Public Schools. The complete handbook is available for $3.00 from Gerald Whitehouse, Director of Federal Programs, Green Bay Board of Education, P. O. Box 1387, Green Bay, WI 54305.

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROVIDES LANGUAGE ARTS EXPERIENCES IN THE KINDERGARTEN

By

Ruth Sylvester
School of Education
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

How does a teacher develop a many-faceted language arts curriculum for kindergarteners? What resources are available? Parents and other members of the community are valuable resources for providing language arts experiences in the kindergarten program. From input of human resources through the various communication methods, children can gain experiences which are basic to learning to read. A teacher should be aware of the supportive expertise, talents, hobbies and creativity available in parents and in the community as a whole.

Teachers have an opportunity to bring together these human resources which may provide children more opportunities for meaningful learning. Some outcomes from using these human resources will include:

- Enriching and expanding concepts and understanding through first-hand experiences,
- Developing communication skills, and
- Building good social and emotional reactions in appreciation of people and their presentations.

A teacher can set up "a climate" for pre-reading and reading activities that will provide opportunities for significant 'human' and 'material' experiences for kindergarteners that are basic to beginning reading. Following is an example of how a parent assisted in bringing a reading experience to kindergarten children.

Martina, a kindergartener, and her mother brought Tina Cat to school so they could 'share' their pet. This meaningful 'hands on' experience elicited sensory and verbal reactions from the children which ended in a written story dictated by the group.

Tina Cat

Tina belongs to Martina.
Tina likes to eat catnip.
Tina is black and white.
She is afraid of people.
She is 11 (eleven) years old.
Do you know what?
She likes to eat cantaloupe!

The following language arts learning experiences emerged from this visit of Martina, her mother and the cat.

1. Tactile, sensory and verbal interactions
2. Questioning: seeking of answers and understandings
3. Vocabulary development in oral and written form
4. Left-to-right progression of words (in reading the chart story)
5. Discrimination: auditory and visual
6. Opportunity: expression in fine arts
7. Extended enjoyment of literature - Millions of Cats, by Wanda Gag
8. Dramatic and role play.

Apart from the group learning, there was opportunity for growth in 'self-esteem' for Martina through the sharing of her cat.

Edgar Dale's "Cone of Experience" (1969) suggests that "successful learning experiences for children begin with the concrete and then move upward in the direction of increasing abstractness." Does this not suggest that many-faceted learning opportunities occur when the child is an active agent, rather than an observer on a "one-way street?"

Tina Cat's visit to the kindergarten may have been a spontaneous act by Martina and her mother. On the other hand the teacher may have had a well developed plan for a different parent to come to the class each week.

Another illustration of parent involvement in the kindergarten contributed to the social studies and language arts program through the celebration of the Chinese New Year. A parent of Taiwanese heritage and her children shared their rice (cooked in the kindergarten), songs and information about their customs. In this situation the family was not only pleased to be asked to visit school, but the kindergarteners and visitors were exposed to cultural differences and unfamiliar customs. From this experience the kindergarten children expressed their feelings in a story.

NI HAU . . "Hello"

The dragon was in the parade.
The dragon was scary and ugly.
We all liked the Chinese songs.
Usings chopsticks was hard but 'fun.'
Bobby liked the rice.
Jenny did not like the rice.
Alex's mom wrote our names in Chinese.

Thus, this extrinsic experience of Taiwanese culture becomes intrinsic on the part of the child through:

1. Actually trying to eat rice with chopsticks--a kinetic feat or defeat!
2. Auditory perception of a different language in song and story.
3. Tactile experiences with texture of clothing; also differences in style and use of buttons.
4. Visual discrimination of the Chinese 'characters' used in writing versus our alphabet (each child's name--written in Chinese--on an individual card).

5. Use of the globe to locate Taiwan and discussion of how one might travel there.
6. Dramatic play with dragon masks.
7. Enjoyment of the book, The Rice Bowl Pet, by Pat Miles.
8. Comparing pictures of life in Taiwan with the United States.
9. Oral to written forms of expression by individual children.

It might be appropriate here to recall the old Chinese proverb:

"I hear and forget
I see and remember
I do and I understand."

The chart story experiences of "Tina Cat" and "NI HAU" gave the kindergarten children actual reading experiences. Some of the skills were comprehension, left-to-right direction, vocabulary development, exposure to printed words, phonetic and visual discrimination. Also, the 'group' stories of these particular experiences when duplicated gave the children the chance to re-read their stories many times and to share them with others. One child was heard to exclaim, "I can read! I can read!"

Community resources represent another avenue for language arts experiences, if one considers a community as composed of people who are sleeping giants, rich in 'human' and 'material' potential. Those responsible for education should incorporate these people into meaningful learning resources in the school.

The following may or may not be unique to such a community of resources:

1. A clown using a non-verbal approach does pantomiming and tricks with miminal equipment and makeup.
2. After children ride on a Soo Line freight train and blow the engine whistle, they also have the oppor-

tunity to listen to a parent who can show a model freight train, and explain the various parts.

3. A mother, who is a philatelist, brings her collection of stamps to school. On a map she locates countries from which the stamps came; she also encourages children to note the stamp designs. Each child, moreover, takes stamps home to 'share' and discuss. A trip to the post-office might be an extended experience. From such an experience, the following story was dictated by a kindergarten class:

Mrs. Juhnke

Mrs. Juhnke is a philatelist.
A philatelist is a stamp collector.
We saw stamps with pictures of animals
and flowers.
We saw stamps from Africa, Canada, Japan,
Sweden, Germany and the United States.

4. Someone who spins wool as a hobby was invited to school. She dressed as Betsy Ross, told about spinning and sang this song:

"Niddy Noddy, Niddy Noddy
What has two legs and one body?
Answer: A wooden yarn winding frame."

Along with other activities to extend this experience the children sent a group-dictated thank-you letter:

Dear Mrs. Struble,

Thank you for coming to our classroom
Thank you for showing us how to spin
and dye wool.

We learned about many new things:
wheels, flyers, bobbins and treadles
and a funny thing called a niddy-noddy.
We liked the niddy noddy song.

More first-hand experiences can evolve because of the human and material resources available in the community. Children interpret these experiences through 1) discussions, 2) seeing their discussions written down as a story, and 3) later hearing their story read.

Thus, a kindergarten teacher who can 'free' herself from prescribed 'readiness' programs has an opportunity to engage children in creative language arts activities. These activities release children from irrelevant busy-work materials which absorb time and often provide only shallow concept building opportunities. Some commercial type materials can be supportive to the language arts program if wisely selected to meet children's needs. Many audio-visual materials such as video tapes, films and film strips can also provide meaningful vicarious learning experiences.

A creative and knowledgeable educator is the 'key' in facilitating a language arts program growing out of community experiences which provides understandings necessary to acquiring basic reading skills.

In summary, what can teachers do in developing language arts experiences for young children? The teacher can:

1. Creatively plan, implement and evaluate program goals
2. Sustain and uphold one's philosophy in meeting children's total needs rather than succumbing to pressures from those criticising her procedures.
3. Cooperate in staff planning by advocating successful learning experiences for children.
4. Use one's academic freedom to make use of resources which build curricula vital to modes of learning. (Each year becomes unique in strategies and outcomes.)

5. Enhance oneself in the community and with colleagues as one demonstrates rapport as a humanist who appreciates many lifestyles and learning abilities of all people.

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EVALUATION OF KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM ISSUES - PARENT EDUCATION

Please complete the following questionnaire on this Issues series. Check the response that best corresponds to your feeling about the question. All responses will be confidential and will be used to improve the Issues series and the work of the Department of Public Instruction. Thank you very much for returning this questionnaire.

Sue Ann Bates

1. When did you receive your copy? _____

2. In general, do you think that teachers can use many of the ideas directly in their classroom?

   _____ Yes, definitely _____ Some of the ideas seem useful _____ Very few of the ideas seem useful

3. Do the articles provide information and ideas that you plan to use in your own classroom:

   _____ Yes, definitely _____ I may use some of the ideas _____ No, I will use very few of the ideas

4. Do you plan to discuss some of the ideas from this series/volume with your supervisor or district administrator?

   _____ Yes, definitely _____ Possibly _____ No

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   _____ This series is a good way to share information.

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7. What suggestions do you have for topics for future volumes of the Issues series? _____

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WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Ms. Sue Ann Bates
Division for Instructional Services
126 Langdon Street
Madison, WI 53702

staple staple